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Paul G. Summers**

**Department of Commerce and Insurance
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CONSUMER ALERT

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Tennessee Officials Release Tire Safety Tips

Because many Tennesseans will travel by car for the Thanksgiving holiday next week, the Tennessee Attorney General's Office and Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs today released a number of tips to help consumers stay safer on the roads. The tips follow a nationwide agreement with Bridgestone/Firestone with regard to allegedly defective tires and misrepresentations made during the tire replacement process and various tire promotions.

"While we are doing what we can to protect Tennesseans," said Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers, "we want to arm them with some vital information to help them use tires in the safest manner possible."

Dave McCollum, director of the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs said, "Two items that should be in every glove compartment are basic ownership tools: the owners manual and a tire gauge. If you don't own a tire gauge, put it at the top of your 'must buy' list. This inexpensive device measures the air pressure in the tire and, when used regularly, can save its cost hundreds of times over."

The tips include:

*Check your tire inflation pressure at least monthly. Under inflation can be as dangerous as over inflation.

Tires lose air over time. Tires lose air faster when the weather turns colder. Remember, under-inflated tires wear more rapidly at the outer edges while overinflated tires wear at the center of the tread. In addition to extending tire life, proper inflation helps save fuel and insures safe steering and handling of your vehicle. See Bridgestone/Firestone's website, www.tiresafety.com for more information.

*Different types of tires are for different purposes. A tire that is best for off-road use is not usually best for highway driving. Most SUV's are never driven off-road. When buying tires, be sure to discuss with your tire sales representative how you will use the tires.

*Tires are rated for traction, temperature resistance, and treadwear. These ratings should appear on the tire's sidewall. The first rating is a treadwear rating (the higher the number the better wear rate), the second is a traction rating (letter, AA, A, B, or C with AA being the best), and the third is a temperature resistance rating (letter, A, B, or C with A being the best).

*Look in the owners manual for the vehicle manufacturer's recommendation for tire pressure and tire rotation. Rotating tires helps to ensure wear more evenly. Generally, tires should be rotated every 5,000 to 7,000 miles.

*Visually examine all four tires monthly for signs of trouble. Look for cuts, cracks, bumps, or bulges on either the sidewall or the tread.

*Overloaded vehicles can be dangerous. The Gross Vehicle Weight of the vehicle which includes the total weight of the vehicle including contents and passengers must not be more than the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating. Overloading the vehicles or the tires on the vehicle could potentially present a safety risk either at that time or at some time in the future. Also, pay attention to the vehicle manufacturer's limitations on the weight that can be carried on the roof rack.

*When considering the purchase of a vehicle, look at the vehicle's rollover resistance rating. These ratings, first released by NHTSA in February (for 2001 models). The rating is by "stars," with five star vehicles being the most stable and one star vehicles being the least stable. See the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration's (NHTSA) web site, www.nhtsa.dot.gov for more information.

*Use seatbelts. As pointed out by NHTSA when the ratings were first announced, "our best chance of surviving a rollover is by buckling up. Eighty percent of the people killed in single vehicle rollovers were unbelted, and we know that belted occupants are about 75 percent less likely to be killed in a rollover crash than unbelted occupants."

"I urge Tennesseans to check their tire pressure before traveling this Thanksgiving," Summers said, "and remember not to overload your vehicle so we can all have a safer holiday."